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32nd President of the United States: 1933 - 1945

Message to Congress on the Education of War Veterans.

October 27, 1943

To the Congress:

On November 13, 1942, on signing the bill calling for the induction by Selective Service of young men eighteen and nineteen years old, I appointed a committee of educators, under the auspices of the War and Navy Departments, to study the problem of education of our service men and women after the war. The objective was to enable those young people, whose education had been interrupted, to resume their schooling, and to provide an opportunity for the education and technical training of other young men and women of ability, after their discharge from the armed services.

This committee has sent me a preliminary report which I am herewith transmitting to the Congress for its consideration, and, I hope, for its early action.

We, at home, owe a special and continuing obligation to these men and women in the armed services.

During the war we have seen to it that they have received the best training and equipment, the best food, shelter, and medical attention, the best protection and care which planning, ingenuity, physical resources, and money could furnish in time of war. But after the war shall have been won, the best way that we can repay a portion of that debt is to see to it, by planning and by action now, that those men and women are demobilized into an economy which is sound and prosperous, with a minimum of unemployment and dislocation; and that, with the assistance of Government, they are given the opportunity to find a job for which they are fitted and trained, in a field which offers some reasonable assurance of well-being and continuous employment.

For many, what they desire most in the way of employment will require special training and further education. As a part of a general program for the benefit of the members of our armed services, I believe that the Nation is morally obligated to provide this training and education and the necessary financial assistance by which they can be secured. It is an obligation which should be recognized now; and legislation to that end should be enacted as soon as possible.

This is a good time not merely to be thinking about the subject, but actually to do something about it. Nothing will be more conducive to the maintenance of high morale in our troops than the knowledge that steps are being taken now to give them education and technical training when the fighting is over.

Every day that the war continues interrupts the schooling and training of more men and women, and deprives them of the education and skills which they would otherwise acquire for use in later life. Not only the individual welfare of our troops, but the welfare of the Nation itself, requires that we reverse this trend just as quickly as possible after the war.

Vocational and educational opportunities for veterans should be of the widest range. There will be those of limited education who now appreciate, perhaps for the first time, the importance of general

education, and who would welcome a year in school or college. There will be those who desire to learn a remunerative trade or to fit themselves more adequately for specialized work in agriculture or commerce. There will be others who want professional courses to prepare them for their life's work.

Lack of money should not prevent any veteran of this war from equipping himself for the most useful employment for which his aptitudes and willingness qualify him. The money invested in this training and schooling program will reap rich dividends in higher productivity, more intelligent leadership, and greater human happiness.

We must replenish our supply of persons qualified to discharge the heavy responsibilities of the postwar world. We have taught our youth how to wage war; we must also teach them how to live useful and happy lives in freedom, justice, and decency.

Specifically, I agree with the recommendations made by the committee in this regard as follows:

1. The Federal Government should make it financially feasible for every man and woman who has served honorably for a minimum period in the armed forces since September 16, 1940, to spend a period up to one calendar year in a school, a college, a technical institution, or in actual training in industry, so that he can further his education, learn a trade, or acquire the necessary knowledge and skill for farming, commerce, manufacturing, or other pursuits.
2. In addition, the Federal Government should make it financially possible for a limited number of ex-service men and women selected for their special aptitudes, to carry on their general, technical, or professional education for a further period of one, two, or three years.

This assistance from Government should include not only cost of instruction but a certain amount of money for maintenance. One incidental benefit of permitting discharged veterans to put in a year or more of schooling or training would be to simplify and cushion the return to civilian employment of service personnel. And I might call to your attention the fact that it costs less per year to keep a man at school or college or training on the job, than to maintain him on active military duty for a year.

While the Federal Government should provide the necessary funds and should have the responsibility of seeing that they are spent providently and under generally accepted standards, the control of the educational processes and the certification of trainees and students should reside in the States and localities.

I am sure that the Congress will agree with me that the report of this committee constitutes a helpful and constructive point of departure in the working out of a practical program for the meeting of this situation. Various recommendations are contained in the report concerning the administration of the plan. While there may be differences as to some of the details, I am confident that the Congress will find merit in the general objectives.

So far as disabled soldiers are concerned, the Congress is aware that, pursuant to existing statutes, the Veterans Administration is prepared to conduct a program of rehabilitation for veterans with service-connected disability. The program is designed to provide for the special needs of war-disabled veterans, and to furnish educational and training opportunities to help them take their places in civilian life. The program has already been initiated, and will be expanded as the war proceeds.

The new program of the Federal Security Agency will make provisions for veterans whose disabilities are not service-connected.

The Army and the Navy require a large number of workers skilled and experienced in various occupations and professions. Men who are filling these posts are acquiring valuable training and experience. A man who has become a mechanical draftsman, a cartographer, a meteorologist, a cook, or a baker may succeed in finding a similar post in civilian life. In a great many other occupations, such as those dealing with tank or tractor maintenance and repair, or with radio operation and maintenance, men are acquiring basic skill and experience which will provide a solid foundation for learning a related civilian occupation.

In addition, the United States Armed Forces Institute, which is a joint operation of the Army and Navy, offers men and women in the armed services a chance to enroll in courses usually offered by colleges, high schools, technical and occupational schools, in which they can study in their off-duty time. The Institute prepares self-teaching textbooks which enable them to learn a subject entirely on their own initiative; or, if they prefer, they may join any one of hundreds of classes which have been or are being established in Army camps and posts and in Navy installations, and in Army and Navy hospitals, here in the United States and in places all over the world. Or if they wish, they can study by the correspondence method with the Institute or with one of its overseas branches the same as any student in a correspondence school.

Opportunities for vocational training and for systematic schooling within the armed services will be expanded and reoriented during periods of demobilization and up to the moment of discharge.

Therefore, if the Congress adopts the general objective outlined herein, our men and women in the armed forces will be afforded opportunities for continuance of their education and vocational training—first, during the war; second, during the demobilization period; and third, for a year or more after their separation from the service.

While the successful conclusion of this great war is by no means within our sight, yet it may well be said that the time to prepare for peace is at the height of war.